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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 000680

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: NINEWA: BIO OF LIKELY INCOMING NINEWA GOVERNOR
ATHEEL ALNUJAIFI

Classified By: Classified by PRT Leader Alex Laskaris, for reasons 1.5
(b) and (d)

This is a Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) message.

11. (C) Summary: Ninewa,s likely future Governor, Atheel Alnujaifi, is a sophisticated politician and astute businessman, but also a polarizing figure in a province where Arab and Kurdish Iraq meet along a legally, ethnically and geographically blurred line. He has deep links to former Ba,ath party elements who have been alienated from the provincial power structure and an uncertain alliance with his main backer, Shammam Sheikh Abdullah al-Yawar. Alnujaifi is opposed to what he calls "multiple poles of power in Ninewa Province," by which he means the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). We would characterize him as generally critical of Coalition Forces (CF), but also willing to work with us across a broad spectrum of issues, including security, development and governance. He has an ambiguous view of political violence, and over the last six weeks has demonstrated a tactical flexibility (born perhaps out of lack of scruples), but also one that we hope will evolve to be more consistent with our interests. Alnujaifi comes to power with a personal and party mandate. To the extent he concentrates on restoring Sunni Arab faith in the provincial administration and avoids gratuitously provocative acts aimed at the Kurds, it is in our interest that he succeed in his governance agenda. At the same time, we must engage him on the issues of Arab-Kurd tensions and blunt his worst impulses. Alnujaifi is a critic of CF but recently told the MND-N commander that June 30 might be too early for US troop withdrawal from Mosul City. He is a critic of our assistance programs but told the USAID Iraq Director that he welcomes capacity-building for the incoming Council and staff. He has been consistent, however, in wanting a permanent US diplomatic presence in Mosul. End summary.

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The man. . .
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12. (C) Alnujaifi is a Sunni Arab born in 1958 into a prominent Moslawi family. His ancestors were closely aligned with the Ottoman rulers of Mosul and received large land grants in Hamdaniya district. He is still a large landowner (the current governor told us he owns the single largest farm in Ninewa) and is known for his horse-breeding skills. He is the Chairman of the Iraqi Arabian Horse Association. End note) He owns two private real estate companies -- Al Nuhail Trade Company and Al Mamur Real Estate -- as well as extensive interests in Middle Eastern agriculture, tourism and transportation. Much of his personal wealth reportedly derived from his Ba,athist connections, including to Uday and Qusay Hussein. Alnujaifi told us he has degrees in Engineering and Law from Mosul University; he is married with five children and keeps his family in Jordan. He speaks very good English but prefers to conduct business through an interpreter.

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The mandate. . .
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¶3. (SBU) Alnujaifi received the highest number of votes of any candidate nationwide in the January 31 elections. He was personally chosen by some 25 percent of the one million Ninewa voters, and by two-thirds of the Al Hudba Gathering,s (AHG) 435,595 voters. He personally outpolled the second-place KDP-dominated Ninewa Fraternity List (NFL). The AHG, which is a coalition rather than a unitary party, won 19 of the 37 seats on the incoming Provincial Council, a majority sufficient to elect a governor, two deputy governors and a Council Chairman. Indicators are that the three Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) members, plus the winners of the Yezidi and Shebak minority seats will caucus with AHG, giving the list 24 seats. The balance belong to the Kurdish-dominated NFL and the pro-KRG Ishtar list, which won the Christian seat.

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The coalition. . .
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¶4. (C) Of the 24 AHG or AHG-affiliated seats in new Council, it is possible that up to 16 will owe primary loyalty to Shammam Sheikh Abdullah. In multiple meetings with us since the elections, Abdullah has expressed support for Alnujaifi,s candidacy for governor, but staked out distinct positions on key issues and demanded the right to name the Chairman of the incoming Council and other key positions. Abdullah has told us that he insists that AHG officials -- at

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least those under his control -- continue to engage and support the USG in the province. While both Alnujaifi and Abdullah share a common antipathy to the KDP and all its manifestations in Ninewa (indeed it is one the main sources of cohesion within an otherwise odd grouping), they disagree on the role of the one Kurd in the AHG list. Alnujaifi wanted to make Dildar Zebari either Council Chairman or Vice Governor. (Comment: Dildar Zebari was a former Iraqi Army officer under Saddam and hence is seen as a turncoat Kurd. It doesn't help that he hails from one of the Kurdistan Region's most prominent clans -- headed by Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari -- which has had a rivalry for power and influence with the Barzani family for at least 60 years. End comment.) Abdullah told us that he is opposed to that move, although that was a change from his previous position.

¶5. (C) In private with us and in public, Alnujaifi has told us that he regards his key constituency to be former Ba'athists who have been out of power since 2003. He speaks to, of, and for a group of what he says are 12,000 former army officers who have been barred from the new IA and whose pension rights have been disregarded. Although as governor he will not command army units in the province, both he and Abdullah have told us that their goal is a Sunni Arab Iraqi Army division raised from and deployed into Ninewa Province.

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The world view. . .
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¶6. (C) Alnujaifi has told us repeatedly that there are too many poles of power in Ninewa Province, by which he means power that is not answerable to his future authority. Foremost in his mind is the KDP, which maintains Peshmerga and Asa,ash units in Ninewa, including below the March 2003 Green Line. This also includes ISF units -- army and police -- that are national entities that respond to Irbil-based command authority. Alnujaifi has told us that he does not acknowledge the existence of disputed areas in Ninewa; in public he carefully refers to them as "areas of co-existence." He does not want substantive discussion on the DIBs issue until after national elections and, as a

"killer amendment," has threatened to put on the table a proposal to re-attach Dahuk Province to Ninewa.

¶7. (C) Alnujaifi has demonstrated tactical and rhetorical flexibility on the question of US forces. In a meeting at the PRT, MND-N Commander MG Caslen told him that US forces would be out of Mosul City by June 30; Alnujaifi,s response was that that may not be possible. Less than a week before, in a meeting with our BCT commander in which he was briefed on ongoing military operations in Mosul, Alnujaifi expressed concern bordering on opposition. On the other hand, Alnujaifi has not and likely will not condemn anti-CF violence. His public rhetoric makes it clear that this non-condemnation, non-endorsement policy is a tacit acknowledgement of the legitimacy of targeting CF personnel.

¶8. (C) Alnujaifi is conversant on a range of USG assistance programs, including USAID,s microfinance institutes; he serves on the board of the Mosul MFI. He told visiting USAID Director Crowley that US assistance has been poorly planned and executed, and that it has enriched an unscrupulous middle-man class who have taken US money but failed to deliver on our promises to the Iraqi people. He said that US assistance "because of this manipulation" has engendered more Qassistance "because of this manipulation" has engendered more ill-will than good in Ninewa, particularly since it has been channeled through unqualified Iraqis and expatriates. At the same time, Alnujaifi accepted assistance through the USAID LGP III program, and gave us as his point of contact a US-trained Iraqi who we know and respect through his work on the PRT-supported Ninewa Business Council. Alnujaifi asked for USG technical assistance on what he says will be a key priority, anti-corruption efforts.

¶9. (C) Together with our BCT partners, we want Alnujaifi,s support for a wide range of Mosul reconstruction activities to be undertaken in concert with CF/ISF military operations in some of the city,s worst neighborhoods. For that we need the buy-in of the Directors General, over whom he and the Council have increased authority under the new provincial powers law. Alnujaifi has made it clear that he does not want high-profile US support, but he has been tacitly supportive of a low-profile role for the USG in infrastructure development.

¶10. (C) Alnujaifi has made it clear from our first meeting with him in July 2008 that he supports a permanent USG diplomatic presence in Mosul. He has already offered to discuss land for construction, although it is not clear if he

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means a commercial or a pro-bono transaction. After consultations with Embassy Baghdad, we have not pursued this issue with him.

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Comment
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¶11. (C) We have what we asked for in Ninewa: a legitimately elected Council that is broadly representative of the population of the province. Alnujaifi is a smart and rational actor. We expect him to dictate the terms of his interaction with us and also to ensure that he has his own channels into the Iraqi political and military leaderships. He has never turned down a meeting request with USG personnel, military or civilian, and likely will continue to engage us. On the issue of Arab-Kurd tensions, Alnujaifi falls into the conflict-seeker category. Whether acting out of personal conviction or the desire to appease his constituency, Alnujaifi will continue to push the envelope. While he will have limited means at his disposal to extend his writ into areas currently under the de facto control of the KRG/KDP, we will have to engage him in a framework in which he can make his positions known but not act on them unilaterally. End comment.

¶12. (C) Orthographic note: We asked him his preferred English spelling for his name: it is "Atheel Alnujaifi," which we will use as our standard from here on.

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